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ABSTRACT

An analysis is presented of the media and public reaction to a strike by state school teachers in New South Wales in 1981. It is pointed out that the media, intentionally and/or unintentionally, provided a biased view of teacher-related issues, which operated at an ideological level against the immediate and long-term interests of teachers. Included in the discussion is an appraisal of newspaper articles and editorials, which for the most part, were negative towards the teachers' aims. Evidence was reported of sensational coverage by the newspapers; in articles, headlines frequently slanted the topic in a negative way. Also discussed are editorials which emphasized the hardship imposed by the strike on children and their parents. The editorials tended to idealize the teacher's role as a "dedicated" person rather than examining the basic reasons for the strike. Politicians' views, as presented in the press and on the radio, are examined, as well as public reactions to the strike as indicated by letters to the editor and responses to a phone-in radio show. The point is made that there appears to be a general feeling that, while teachers have the "right" to strike, they should be too devoted to the welfare of the public to do so. (JD)

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ISSUE NUMBER SIX* : 2 APRIL 1984

THE MEDIA AND TEACHERS' STRIKES: NSW 1981

ROB WHITE

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THE MEDIA AND TEACHERS' STRIKES: NSW 1981

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Rob White has just completed a Ph.D. in the sociology of education, at the Australian National University.

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THE MEDIA AND TEACHERS' STRIKES: NSW 1981

ROB WHITE

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INTRODUCTION

In the early months of 1981 state school teachers in New South Wales were involved in industrial action on a level unprecedented in the history of education in that State.

The strike generated a tremendous amount of media activity, from newscoverage on ABC television right through to letters in the Bulletin. Needless to say, Sydney newspapers and electronic media provided extended coverage of the dispute as well.

As part of a more general study of the changing status and position of teachers in contemporary Australian society I decided to examine the circumstances surrounding the strike in greater depth. In the course of my research I was struck by the comments of several teachers who said that by and large the media treatment of the strike was 'better than usual' or even '(relatively) good'. To a certain extent, if the teacher bashing by the Bulletin is anything to judge by, it might be said that the mass media in this instance had performed better than expected from the viewpoint of teachers.

On the other hand, as will be shown, the presentation of the strike in and by the media was in many respects not as favourable as might have first appeared to be the case. This paper describes in fact how the media presentation of the teachers strike effectively de-legitimated the industrial action taken by the New South Wales teachers.

My intention in the following analysis is to map out the particular ways in which the media, intentionally and/or unintentionally, provides a view of teacher-related issues which operates at an ideological level against the immediate and long-term interests of teachers. Included in the discussions are an appraisal of newspaper articles and editorials, a look at the views of politicians as presented in the press and on the radio, and a review of 'public reactions to the strike as indicated by letters to the editor and responses to a phone-in radio show on the issue.

While the finding presented focus on the media treatment of a particular issue, the processes described are not unique to this specific instance.

The analysis thus should also be seen as providing a case study which contributes to our understanding of how the media in general constructs the news and of the mechanisms whereby issues and events are systematically presented in biased fashion.

THE 1979-81 SALARIES DISPUTE

The event which sparked the taking of strike action by NSW teachers in 1981 was a salaries decision handed down by Justice Dey of the NSW Industrial Commission in December 1980. To understand the reactions of teachers to this decision, we can briefly review the circumstances surrounding the salaries judgement.

The salaries case was conducted in accordance with principles of wage determination as laid down in the Wage Indexation Guidelines. A significant feature of the case was the fact that, because of the principles guiding wage indexation, the Teachers' Federation was not allowed to present evidence showing that their wage relativities in relation to Average Weekly Earnings had deteriorated in recent years. It was also restricted from citing increases in the salaries of comparable public service groups as indications that a substantial increase for teachers was warranted. For NSW teachers to gain salary increases, they were obliged under the Guidelines to establish changes in work value.

The criteria of 'changes in work value' as the basis for wage determination, however, makes judgements regarding wage increases extremely difficult. For instance, there are inherent conceptual and technical problems in:

a. Defining Work value.

b. Measuring changes in work value; and

c. (granting that changes in work value have occurred), translating the measurement of these changes into monetary terms.

In the end, reliance on the notion of work value effectively makes the process of wage determination largely a question of guesswork, with judgements of the

merits of a case determined with reference to criteria which is by no means clear or straightforward.

The initial work in compiling material for the salaries claim took place in 1978. Knowing that 'teachers salaries claims have never been won easily', the Federation hoped to prepare the most thorough and convincing case for its claim as possible. By November of 1979, it was announced in a special 'salary booklet' that 'Your union, the NSW Teachers' Federation has, after 12 months of work by the Salaries Committee, and a membership wide survey to determine the nature of a claim, arrived at a 20% flat claim for increases in all salaries and allowances for all members, not only members teaching in the major areas of primary, secondary and TAFE'. (NSWTF, 1979 : page 2). The 24 page booklet provided an exhaustive treatment of 'changes in work value' between 1974 and 1979, and constituted the arguments presented to the Public Service Board (PSB) on November 1 and November 6.

The reply by the Public Service Board on November 23 stated that no pay rise offer would be made as, according to the PSB, there had been no net increase in the work value of teachers.

In December, after a meeting with the Combined Public Service Union about wage increases in the private sector, Premier Wran announced that decisions over wages and salary increases would only come from decisions of the NSW Industrial Commission. With regard to this, the Federation then referred the salaries question to its Annual Conference which endorsed the submission of an application for an Award - a 20% claim, including an interim increase of 10% - to the NSW Industrial Commission.

The case for the interim claim was presented during February and March of 1980, lasting six days and involving four Federation and two Departmental witnesses. On March 20, the Industrial Commission granted a 4.3% interim pay rise, retrospective to December 14, 1979.

In June the main salaries case commenced, and was finally concluded in December of 1980. It should be mentioned that during the proceedings Justice Dey stood over the case a number of times on the grounds that the teachers were pursuing industrial action - regardless of the fact that this activity centred on questions relating to work conditions, and not to salaries. Furthermore, it can be noted that the delays in the case were attributable

in part to the propensity of the judge to agree with the Employer's interpretation as to what constituted grounds for standing the case down. The judge was also to act quickly in adjourning the proceedings when a contempt of Court charge was levelled against the Federation by the PSB.

After 43 days - which saw forty-seven Federation witnesses provide evidence in court, visits by the judge to schools and colleges (and evidence from a further forty-six Federation members during the visits), and two Departmental witnesses giving evidence - Justice Dey awarded a further 2.5% increase for teachers. The total pay increase for teachers according to the Court's decision of December 19 was 6.8% (interim case and the main case combined).

In his conclusion, Justice Dey found that there had been a significant net addition to the work value of teachers, and that therefore a work value pay increase was warranted. Acknowledging the merit of the teachers' salaries case, he then proceeded to describe how the amount of increase was arrived at through reference to the Queensland teachers' salaries decision:

> *... it is not unreasonable to assume that the infusion of Commonwealth funds into the State education system has exerted a significant influence upon the development of educational practices in Queensland as well as in New South Wales and that as in this State it was the catalyst which led to a number of changes.* (1980 : page 34).

Simply put, insofar as both States had received extra funding from a common source in the States Grants (School) Act (Commonwealth) and were influenced by programmes emanating from the Schools Commission, Justice Dey assumed that changes in work value in each State would bear strong similarities.

The reaction of NSW teachers to the judgement was, to say the least, unfavourable. The Federation held the following view of the proceedings:

> *Despite the fact that all evidence was within the guidelines of wage indexation which disallow the use of evidence comparing teachers' salaries with other groups, Justice Dey stated in his judgement that the Queensland teachers' salaries decision would have to be taken into account. He handed down the same final judgement as the Queensland teachers received after presenting 5 days of evidence, a paltry 2.5%.*

The judgement in the NSW Teachers' Salaries Case was a mockery of justice. (NSWTF, 1981a : page 2).

Further salt was rubbed into the wounds when shortly after the case concluded Victorian high school principals received a 15% pay increase.

In January, the NSW Teachers' Federation held its adjourned Annual Conference on salaries and staffing decisions. The Conference, 'in pursuit of teachers' just demands on salaries and staffing', directed a twenty-four hour stoppage of primary and secondary teachers on January 28, 1981. All members of the Federation including Technical teachers were called upon to attend mass meetings on the 28th to consider the following resolution:

This meeting condemns the Salary Judgement of Mr Justice Dey as an insult to teachers. This meeting deplores the failure of the New South Wales Government to improve the staffing of public schools and reduce class sizes in accordance with its own commitments.

The Senior Officers are requested to seek discussions with the Premier and the Minister on Wages and Infants, Primary, Secondary and TAFE staffing.

Action on staffing as determined by Annual Conference is to commence immediately in accordance with Federation's guidelines.

This meeting calls on the Federation to direct a State-wide stoppage commencing on Wednesday, 4 February. Mass meetings to be held on 4 February will determine when and in what way teachers will return to school.

Approximately 70 to 80 per cent of teachers in the State went out in support of the strike action. That feelings were running high is indicated by the passing of the above motion by 16,000 teachers attending a strike meeting at Wentworth Park, with the addition of a sentence which read:

This meeting expresses its disgust with the continued unethical and dishonest behaviour of the Wran Government in its dealings with NSW Teachers' Federation over Salaries and Staffing.

Although the press provided extensive coverage of the teachers' strike action, there was little concrete action taken by the Government at this time other than the making of public statements on the strike activity of teachers. However, when the great majority of teachers went on strike for another two days - the 4th and 5th of February - the Government was forced to act. On 13 February, the State intervened in the dispute in a direct way, with the Minister for Industrial Relations, Mr Pat Hills, being directed by the Premier to refer the matter to the Full Bench of the NSW Industrial Commission. In the subsequent case teachers were awarded a further 3.2 per cent in response to their work value claim.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

As a prelude to a more specific examination of how the teachers' strike was presented in the media, we can begin by briefly considering the conventional attitudes to strikes in capitalist societies. Certainly the most remarkable aspect of widespread feelings about strikes is that, while on the one hand the right to strike is generally conceded, on the other hand, when workers do actually withdraw their labour this is rarely seen as legitimate. Davis' study (1982), for example, confirms that in Australia 'the public considers that trade unions have the right to exist and to take industrial action, but that they strike too often, have too much power and are responsible for the economic crisis'. (Page 31).

The negative image of trade unions and of strikes does not arise by chance. Specific disputes are regularly distorted by the media (Davis, 1982; David and Walton, 1980) so as to give the impression that strikes are irresponsible and illegitimate. The position of workers in capitalist society mitigates against sympathetic treatment by the capitalist press (which is part and parcel of the bourgeois multi-conglomerate establishment), and even where 'balanced' reporting of events may occur the overriding message is one of maintaining the industrial status quo. As Hyman (1977) comments:

Attempts at objectivity in some papers' accounts of some strikes in any case hardly extend to editorial generalisations, or evaluations of particular disputes. It is not uncommon for leader-writers to assail strikers as unreasonable and unreasoning, while a report on the facing news page makes obvious that neither accusation is justified. Editorial cliches have a built-in bias against collective action by workers. (Page 152/3).

When it comes to teachers going on strike, there is once again general agreement that teachers have got the right to strike, although whether they ought to take such action or not is a more contentious issue. Ideologically, government teachers have in fact been subjected to ill-informed public criticisms, and efforts to de-legitimate their demands for improved school and work conditions. On the one hand, they (supposedly) strike too often: 'It is not unreasonable to consider that a major factor in the disenchantment with State schools has been the increasing militancy of the State school teachers' unions'. (Sheridan, 1983 : Page 43). On the other hand they (supposedly) have little reason to take collective action at all: 'Overall, it is hard not to conclude that the education sector, far from being the disadvantaged victim of stringent funding policies, is the most pampered group in the community. It is hard to think of anyone who work less to get more'. (Sheridan, 1981 : Page 53). As will be elaborated on below, the media does indeed play a major part in running down strikes by teachers.

Even before the teachers take such action, however, the groundwork for a negative image of teachers as strikers has been laid. The apparent propensity of teachers to go on strike was alluded to in the first comment by Sheridan. The accompanying table shows in fact that at the State level in New South Wales, teachers have only struck twice in the last six years (to 1981), and that in every case except the latter one, the strikes have been restricted to just one day. Nevertheless, sweeping statements on the militancy of State school teachers promulgated in the media have no little effect on the attitudes of members of the public - with rather interesting results on occasion. As Gerry Tickell, former President of the Australian Teachers' Federation, commented in 1981:

The much-quoted Morgan Poll, published early this year, showed that significant numbers of people thought that teachers went on strike too often. However, the poll also showed that more than 10 per cent of people in States where teachers had not been on strike at all during the period under survey believed that teachers had been on strike too often in that time!
(1981 : Page 217).

STATE-WIDE FEDERATION STRIKES

1968 - 1981

1968	1/10	Multiple issues
1973	27/11	State-wide strike on Salaries
1974	18.9	State-wide stoppage on Salaries
1975	25/3	Teaching Service Act Amendment Bill
1976		NATIONAL strike on Medibank
1978	26/9	Quality Education
1981	28/1)	
	4 & 5/2)	Salaries and Staffing
	17/2)	

Source: NSWTF memo to all officers, 30 March 1981.

The public response to teacher strikes, however, is not simply one of condemnation or annoyance at the frequency of industrial action of this sort. Popular conceptions of 'the teacher', coupled with a generalised media attack on members of the occupation when engaged in strike activity, have a considerable ideological impact on how the teacher as a striking worker is perceived. And we should also bear in mind that the disparaging portrayal of government schools by the media serves as a crucial backdrop in media efforts to discredit State school teachers, even though industrial action which is taken is by and large geared to providing needed improvements in the educational and work conditions of these schools.

Media Treatment of the Teachers' Strike

The mass media obviously has an influential role in shaping public opinions of various events. It is important in this regard to note that, in the case of strikes, the attitudes of the members of the public appear to 'mirror

exactly the viewpoint adopted by the media'. (Davis, 1983 : Page 31). Granting the importance of the media in the presentation of current issues, it is essential then to examine in some depth how the media treated the teachers' strike of 1981.

For the purpose of this study, the media sample consisted of five Sydney based newspapers - The Daily Telegraph (D.T.), The Daily Mirror (D.M.), The Sun (Sun), The Sun-Herald (S.-H.), and The Sydney Morning Herald (S.M.H.) - and The Australian, a newspaper which, while more national in the scope of its coverage, has a substantial distribution in the Sydney area. The content analysis of these newspapers focused on the editorials, news items, commentaries and letters to the editor printed during the early months of 1981 which dealt with the teachers' salaries/staffing dispute. For the sake of presentation, discussions of the specifically media response are divided into a section dealing with the general coverage by the newspapers, followed by a section considering the editorials commenting on the strike (public response, particularly in the form of letters to the editor, and the response of politicians will be considered in later sections of the paper).

A. General Coverage

All in all, the tone of the media coverage on the teachers' strike was quite negative. We shall explore this in greater detail shortly. For now, it is important to emphasise that I began by stating that the tone of the media treatment was overwhelmingly unfavourable. This is not to say that everything that was written was necessarily unsympathetic to the teachers. Thus, both the Sydney Morning Herald (February 7) and the Daily Telegraph (February 1), for example, did features on the economic and extra teaching burdens teachers have had to face in recent years. However, these were presented more in the vein of 'human interest' stories, or as a limited attempt to balance the picture of the workworld of the teacher. In the overall media response to the teachers' strikes, these kind of stories did not figure prominently and indeed appeared as exceptions to the rule.

Another aspect of the media treatment was that, even where the reportage was less sensationalistic and where it was obvious that the reporter had done his or her homework in preparing a news item, the headline often

misconstrued the content of the article. This was particularly apparent in the case of a report in The Australian (January 29) where the author, Mark Camm, presented a sensitive treatment of the issues involved and canvassed a number of views on the dispute. Juxtaposed with this more analytical treatment was a headline which declared in bold type, 'Teachers' Striking First Lesson'. A major feature of the media's treatment of the strike was the emphasis on catchy headlines. In effect, many of the news items were prejudged by the type of headlines placed over them. This has two important implications with regard to the reading of these newspaper accounts. Firstly, although the news items themselves may (and I stress the qualification) have provided apparently balanced reporting of the dispute, the first impression given by the headlines could predispose the casual reader to pick those elements in the actual story which best match the headlines, thereby leaving an overall negative appraisal of the situation (from the teachers' viewpoint). Secondly, postulating that many people would not even bother to read the stories, the headlines can be seen as crucial in creating a negative or distorted image of the teachers' strike. Thus, for the 'quick glance' reader, the problem could be seen in simple terms - as the result of irresponsible teachers.

A major component of the press treatment was the continual impression given that the event was simply a teacher dispute. Teachers were seen as the active party, the Government merely reacting to an (apparently) unreasonable stance on the part of the Federation. Headlines such as 'New Threat By Teachers', 'Teachers See More Stoppages' in the Daily Mirror or 'Teachers Pay Threat', 'Last-ditch Bid on Teachers', in the Daily Telegraph, for instance, reinforced the notion that it was teachers, and teachers alone, who were responsible for the industrial strife. It would be only too easy to gather from this that the teachers must assume all of the 'blame' for the unrest. It also implies that teachers have the major responsibility in settling their differences with the employer and getting back on the job.

The view of the strike itself was uniformly presented by all of the newspapers. The emphasis was on the consequences of the strike action and the unreasonable attitude of teachers. The Daily Telegraph spoke of school turmoil, reporting on 25 January that, 'Seventy per cent of NSW primary and secondary schools could close - affecting some 600,000 students - during

next Wednesday's 24-hour strike by teachers'. A few days later it reported that 'Hundreds of parents will be recruited in a bid to ease the chaos caused by today's teachers' strike'. (28 January). Similarly, the Sydney Morning Herald highlighted the fact that 'School's in - except for teachers' (23 January), and gauged the consequences of the strike in the following terms: 'The schoolteachers' strike will effectively stop 90 per cent of classes at State schools in Sydney today ... the figures are the result of a Herald survey of 216 Sydney metropolitan schools'. (28 January).

With the main media focus on the effects of the strike on parents and children, little attention was given to the reasons and context whereby teachers felt that they had to strike. The strike was considered unreasonable both because it created chaos (with children as the main victims), and because of the teachers' demands themselves. It was reported in the Daily Telegraph, for example, that 'The teachers were angry that they were granted a pay rise of 6.8 per cent last year when they claimed a 20 per cent increase'. (23 January). This leaves the impression that teachers were not only unrealistic in their demands but greedy as well. What it does not mention is the grounds for the decisions by Justice Dey of the Industrial Commission, nor the loss in comparative wage status suffered by teachers since 1974. This would have been essential in order to put the teachers' anger into perspective.

That teachers were being unreasonable was reinforced by headlines such as 'Teachers defiant over strike' (31 January) and 'Angry teachers are likely to strike for 48 hours from today - and more stoppages are looming' (4 February) in the Daily Telegraph (emphasis added), ''Cool Off' - Landa's Plea to Teachers' (4 February in The Sun (emphasis added), and 'Belligerent teachers have poor case : Landa' (5 February) in the Sydney Morning Herald (emphasis added). Not only were teachers presented here as emotional, thereby implying that their strike behaviour was irrational, but this is seen in turn to hinder progress toward the resolution of the dispute. A key item in this regard was the frequency and importance attached to the work 'talk'. Used in many a headline and article, the usual progression was along the lines that:

a. 'Teachers' next strike rests on new talks' (9 February).

b. 'Talks fail to settle teachers' dispute' (11 February); and

c. 'New Talks on NSW Teachers' dispute' (12 February) - Sydney Morning Herald.

What is suggested by these headlines is that firstly, talking (a 'rational' form of conciliation) is essential in order to resolve the dispute, and secondly, that teachers are not listening to the other side of the argument, otherwise the talks would have succeeded. By implication the onus is on the teachers - and not the employer - to take a calm and sensible approach to things, ie, to give in to the employer's point of view.

With respect to the status of teachers, the mass media berated the occupation basically for the reason that 'modern' teachers were going against the traditional image of the profession. Conceptions of the 'good' teacher crept into the reportage in several ways. The Daily Telegraph, for example, pointed out at length that:

> *Pay and conditions were only part of the reason why people became teachers. There was also a thing called 'dedication'. And another called 'service to the public'. The job had prestige. But not any more. Since last week's stoppage - on the day school resumed after the Christmas holidays - newspapers have been full of public bitterness towards the teachers for letting the community down.* (3 February).

A long article in the Sydney Morning Herald focused on the teachers' meeting at Wentworth Park to discuss the staffing and salaries demands (10 February). In the midst of the report the author, Spiro Zavos, commented in passing that 'The meeting had been going for an hour and ten minutes before 'students' were mentioned for the first time'. Not surprisingly, the teachers' apparent abrogation of their perceived responsibilities to the pupils was picked up by a sub-editor who titled the story, 'Teachers do it in style (But it did take some time for students to be mentioned)'. An article in the Sun Herald cited Hugh Philip, a professor in the Department of Education at Macquarie University, as sayingthat the main casualties of the strike could be teachers because they would enjoy diminished respect in the community (8 February). This appeal to an authoritative opinion was published on the same page as a picture of eight-year-old Michelle Snare - sitting by her lonesome in a school classroom. The note underneath the photograph quoted the girl as saying 'There's a strike - but it's much

better when the other children are here'. The message of these news items of course was loud and clear. Teachers need to renew their dedication to their students, and regain the respect of the community, by desisting from strike activity.

This view of the responsibility of teachers was also conveyed by the prominence given in the media to those teachers who took pains to protect students from the ill effects of the strike. Exceptions to the rule were used as subtle hints highlighting what the proper and more reasonable behaviour of teachers should be like. Thus, for example, the Daily Mirror, in a report titled 'Teachers' help could teach others a lesson', made an exemplary example of Double Bay Primary School 1968 (30 January). Here the teachers did not go on strike, but instead made their protest by donating one day's pay to Stewart House, the centre for under-privileged children maintained by the Teachers' Federation. (The employers no doubt would be more than pleased if all workers conducted 'protests' in this fashion). In another instance, the Sun noted that on the teachers' fourth strike stoppage, at least teachers at one school (Illawong Public) would be attending its swimming carnival. The school's principal was quoted as saying that 'The teachers supported the previous strikes but they decided the swimming carnival was more important for the children' (17 February). Once again, the implication was that the most responsible and successful strike for teachers occurs when teachers stay in the classroom. To withdraw their services (ie, their labour) is 'selfish' and leads to the children suffering the consequences of their 'irresponsible' actions.

Not only was the strike seen as selfish, but there were hints that the leaders of the Federation were unduly influenced by 'leftist ideology'. In a report in the Sydney Morning Herald on 5 February, for instance, a brief reference to a meeting at Wentworth Park by 20,000 teachers gave more space to the following passage, than to discussion of the contents of the meeting itself:

> *During the two-hour meeting a woman brandishing a bible demanded to be allowed to speak - 'as an Australian mother'. 'I am here doing something worthwhile for this country. I will not have it dominated by red communists' she yelled.*

Religion, Motherhood, and Service - the quotation speaks for itself. The fact that the interruption to the meeting was given the prominance it was in the newspaper story essentially focused the reader's attention on the 'real' issues involved. That is, that strikes are not 'worthwhile', but part of a communist plot. The main message here was that the strike itself was not legitimate but simply another indication of left-wing agitation.

The image of the teacher as striker was dealt with in even more substantive fashion in the newspaper editorials.

b. Editorials

The treatment of the teachers' strike in the editorials tended to concentrate on the effects (including the timing) of the strike action, and the avenues available whereby a peaceful resolution of the problem could have been achieved. In addition to the usual verbiage about how the children are the victims of each stoppage, several newspapers (eg. The Sydney Morning Herald and the Daily Telegraph) also mentioned the problems faced by parents, particularly those characterised as working mothers, when teachers walked off the job.

The editorial writer for The Australian was particularly upset at the fact that the first stoppage took place on the first day of school. While the author's main lament had to do with the timing of the strike, it was clear that strike action was presented as the worst of several (unstated) options. The editorial concluded with the comment that: 'It might be an old-fashioned notion but parents still expect the teachers of their children to be responsible and caring. Today's strike dishonours that trust.' (28 January, emphasis added). Notions such as 'duty', 'the rights of children', 'diligence' and so on were often counterposed in the newspaper editorials to things such as 'irresponsible', 'selfish', 'shameful', etc. The Daily Mirror put it this way:

> New South Wales teachers have just about destroyed the last tattered vestiges of their professional standing and integrity ... The teachers' whole behaviour comes down to a flagrant disregard of law and order, a reprehensible exercise in bully tactics and bad temper. What they are teaching by example is the very antithesis of the discipline and respect and good manners they

expect from their students. (5 February, emphasis added.)

In effect, the strike was seen in terms of it being a 'teacher tantrum' (Sun, 4 February), and as such the actions of teachers were seen to be totally out of character vis-a-vis what a proper teacher should act like. The behaviour of teachers was seen to go against popular conceptions of members of the occupation and to betray the social and ethical responsibilities of the profession. Thus, 'How much longer can parents tolerate and teachers' continuing threats of industrial action which can only be regarded as dereliction of duty?' (Daily Telegraph, 23 January). As strikers, teachers were portrayed as denying a fundamental professional characteristic - that of the dedicated provision of a service to the community before all else. With regard to this, the Sydney Morning Herald commented that 'teachers seem unimpressed with the argument that the interests of schoolchildren should be paramount. They may not admit it, but in effect they are arguing that their own interests should be paramount.' (4 February.)

A major complaint by the editorial writers centred on the procedures teachers had available to them in having their demands dealt with without the need for strike action. The Sun, for example, suggested that 'Teachers would set children a better example if they first explored some of the peaceful industrial avenues open to them - and kept the big stick under wraps.' (23 January.) In more substantive terms, the Sydney Morning Herald argued on 4 February that 'The weakness of their case is that they have not been pursuing it through normal industrial channels ... the teachers' obvious course was, and is, to lodge a formal appeal with the Full Bench of the Industrial Commission.' In a letter to that newspaper a few days later (7 February), Barry Manefield, President of the Federation, attempted to offset this argument by commenting that the reason why teachers were loathe to appeal was because, unlike the earlier police case, the NSW Government was not prepared to support the appeal. This reply was somewhat weakened, however, by its positioning underneath a cartoon deriding the work of teachers and the legitimacy of their pay claim.

S.M.H. cartoon on 'letters' page, 7 February.

The uncharacteristic behaviour of teachers in regards to their perceived social role and responsibilities, and the so-called unreasonable decision to take strike action, inevitably led several newspapers to point their finger at teacher leaders as the source of the trouble. According to the Daily Mirror there would not be school on the first day of the term -

> All because a militant band of teachers in this State has decided to join in the great Australian past-time ... go on strike.
>
> The criticism and blame for this monumental irresponsibility cannot be levelled at all teachers (many have indicated they will ignore the strike call and report for work).

> But it is disgusting that their federation should even contemplate a strike and, to heighten confusion and uncertainty, on the day that school resumes. (27 January.)

As events were to show, however (supposedly), either the leadership was exceptionally strong, or rank-and-file teachers were misinformed; for the vast majority of the teachers answered the strike call. Nevertheless, this did not stop the Sydney Morning Herald from seeking reasons for the militancy other than that of the anger of teachers at the grass roots level. For example, the strike situation itself was presented as occurring in exceptional circumstances. Thus, 'The Federation's aggressiveness may also be explained by the coincidence that this is an election year for both it and the Government. Federation leaders are both anxious to demonstrate their militancy and hopeful that the Government will be susceptible to pressure.' (17 February.) The bottom line from this account is that a minority of aggressive and self-interested union leaders unnecessarily swayed the majority of teachers to take irresponsible action. The reasons for the strike were not examined in depth, nor was the representativeness of the union leaders' views considered in the light of the massive support from the teacher ranks.

The kind of picture which emerges from the newspaper editorials was by no means the only form of substantive comment on the teachers' strike. Equally important to consider is the reliance of the press on expert or official comments by politicians and representatives of parent bodies.

Responses to the Strike by State Politicians

State politicians in New South Wales were to play a major ideological role in de-legitimatising the actions of teachers during the strike period. Early on in the dispute the Daily Telegraph commented that 'it is up to Mr. Landa to control the militant teachers who have led their colleagues into this industrial confrontation. It is up to him to make the teaching profession understand the Government is doing all that can be done.' (28 January.) Both Mr. Landa, the Education Minister, and Mr. Wran, the Premier, rose to the task of 'making the teaching profession understand' by using arguments designed to sway public opinion against the teachers.

In the case of Neville Wran, Labor Premier of New South Wales, the Teachers' Federation has sent repeated telex messages from 9 December onwards requesting a meeting on salaries and staffing matters. The Federation continually stressed the urgency of the situation in its three telex messages prior to the stoppage meeting on Wednesday, 28 January. In the first concrete response by Mr. Wran, however, he informed the teachers on 23 January that he had issued a press statement in the following terms:

> The paramount interest is that of the children who will be affected by the strike action of the teachers. I would be prepared to see representatives of the Teachers' Federation early Tuesday morning if the threat of disruption to the schools were lifted, but there is no reason why the Government and the children of this State should become pawns in a battle between the Teachers' Federation and the Industrial Commission.

The teachers replied with the following answer:

> We repeat requests to meet you first made on 9 December and subsequently. Such meeting was requested then without conditions and requests when repeated have all been without conditions from Federation. Paramount interest of children and adults, including teachers, make it imperative that negotiations occur immediately. (NSWTF, 1981b).

A meeting with the Premier was subsequently held however on Friday, 31 January, which continued over to the next Monday. The teacher representatives made it clear that they would only seek an appeal if the Education Commission (their employer) would indicate to the Industrial Commission that it supported the principle of a further wage increase. In what Federation officers saw as a high-handed attitude, the Premier responded by announcing that the Minister for Industrial Relations had referred the dispute to the Full Bench of the NSW Industrial Commission as a matter of urgency.

It was clear from the beginning that the Premier saw the problem as the 'teachers' problem and for a variety of reasons was unwilling to grant legitimacy to their demands or their tactics. Wran's basic argument was that the Government simply could not offer a pay rise. Thus, the Daily Telegraph quotes him as saying that: 'We have claims from all sorts of people in the community and we cannot single out teachers for special attention ... We cannot give teachers what they are demanding.' ('Wran: No More Pay for Teachers', 30 January).

In effect, in the very process of denying it, Wran was isolating teachers from the rest of the workforce. Firstly, their salaries case was not presented in terms of the work that teachers were performing, but the costs to the Government of paying for their labour power. Secondly, as documented by the Teachers' Federation, the teachers were not asking to be singled out for special attention but were trying to maintain their wage parity with those groups, such as the police, who had been granted significant pay rises by the same Government and by private employers.

Wran was to further promote the distance between teachers and other workers by using the occupational image of teachers in his ideological attacks on the strike action. In the same Daily Telegraph report as above, he went on to argue that, 'My respect for teachers is not yet diminished. But I am perilously close to losing my respect for them when up to 80 percent of teachers go on strike and leave little children to wander home unattended.' Not only does this comment implicitly make just a position between the good old traditional profession and the more industrially militant (and therefore bad) new version, but it implies that attending children as they 'wander home' is a normal routine and part of the teacher's job. If one is to accept this at face value, then it becomes easy to accept the connotation that striking teachers are responsible for putting the lives of children in danger.

While Wran added an influential voice to the negative portrayal of the teachers' strike, the key Government figure focused on the press was Paul Landa, the NSW Minister for Education.

Landa's attacks on the teachers ranged from misrepresenting the issue, to deflecting the blame for the drop in teachers' living standards away from the State Government. In the former case, for example, he argued that 'The Federation's unwillingness to appeal (to the NSW Industrial Commission) indicates they may lack confidence in their work value case arguments'. (SMH, 'Belligerent teachers have poor case: Landa', 5 February.) This was patently false; for if anything the teachers lacked confidence in the proceedings of the Industrial Commission itself, which they felt had not given the work value case a 'fair go'. The response in the latter case was to pinpoint the Federal Government as being a major villain: 'In fact everyone's living standards have dropped significantly under the Fraser administration.' (SMH, 'Paul Landa confronts his old radical mates', 7 February.)

The most sustained critique, and one which consisted of many of the statements Landa made to the press, was made in a discussion with Caroline Jones on 'City Extra', a Sydney radio 2BL talk show (27 January).

Early on in the interview, Landa 'clarified' his position on strikes by teachers in the following way:

Caroline Jones: Are you in a difficult position, politically, being Minister for Education, also being a member of the ALP? I mean do you believe in the right to strike?

Landa: Of course their right to strike is a very age old and respected one, but especially in the trade union movement that has its affiliations with the Australian Labor Party, but one must look at it a bit more broadly. We're not the ALP here, we're the Government of New South Wales.

Caroline Jones: Well you're both.

Landa: Well we're both, but we now have to act in the interests of all the people of New South Wales, not just the ALP voters or ALP members or trade union members ...

While the Minister for Education was quick to affirm the 'age old and respected' right to strike, the fact of the matter was that according to the Industrial Arbitration Act (1940), by definition, all strikes by crown employees are illegal. Perhaps he really meant that the right to strike is appropriate to specific groups of workers, but not to all workers. Certainly this is the sense one gets from his appraisal of the teachers' strike.

A major justification for the NSW Government's hard line on the strike action by teachers, is that Landa and his colleagues are not simply ALP members but as the party in office must act in the 'interests of all the people'. By justifying its activities in terms of 'the people's interest', the Government can act in a manner which on the surface appears to transcend class differences. If we were to examine the beneficiaries of the majority of actions done in the 'interests of the people', however, the result usually is that the employers have the most to gain, and the workers as a whole the most to lose. As the extensive Marxist literature on the State shows us, the State plays an essential role in maintaining the economic and ideological interests of Capital (Cf., for a review of this literature, Gold et. al., 1975; Macpherson, 1978). The fact that a Labor Government is in power does little to change this situation (Cf., Miliband, 1969; Poulantzas, 1973). As Olsen (1977) comments:

> As long as the capitalist class retains the private right to accumulate and invest wealth, this right being guaranteed by the State, the public State apparatus can be manned by personnel from other classes, who may in fact be better suited to achieving compromises, concessions, and ideological hegemony which are necessary to reproduce and advance the whole bourgeois order through time. (p. 200/201)

In the specific instance of the strike action by teacher, the use of the 'people's interest' argument by Landa not only allows him to portray the strike as illegitimate (can one think of an occasion where a strike is presented as being in the interests of the people?), but puts the blame for the dispute squarely on the backs of the teachers.

After all, the Government is concerned with everyone's interest, while the teachers are simply caught up in their own self-interests. Ergo, what teachers do is wrong from the start, the Government only responding to their irresponsible actions. What should teachers have done then?

> They should have exercised their right of appeal, found out what the Full Court of the Conciliation-Industrial Commission of New South Wales would award them and they should have awaited the talks with the Premier and myself. (p. 6.)
> ... We will as a State, abide by the decisions of the Industrial Commission of New South Wales and if the Industrial Commission orders a wage increase, then we will have to find the funds and they'll have to come out of other programmes or out of increased levies on the State of New South Wales ... (p. 17.)

These statements are presented as a rational response to the teachers' situation. On the one hand, the Industrial Commission is presented as a neutral referee in the dispute - regardless of the fact that the impetus for the strike in the first place was a decision made by a member of that body. On the other hand, the Government of NSW was willing to abide by the decisions of the Court. And why not? Firstly, the initial decision by Justice Dey certainly favoured the employer, and not the teachers. Secondly, the Government can appeal (and usually win) in the case where a substantial pay rise is awarded. In 1982, for example, the anti-worker stance of the Wran Government was indicated by the fact that, 'The nurses, senior public servants and police officers, and indeed judges and magistrates, have found favourable wage and salary decisions awarded by industrial tribunals, appealed by this, a workers' Government.' (Canberra Times, 1982.) The umpire's decision is acceptable then only when the Government is satisfied with the scale of the increase. One of the reasons why the Government holds the key to rolling back increases through the Industrial Commission is its argument that funds simply are not available. To 'find the funds', we are told that the Government would have to raid money from other programmes or increase State levies. In other words, to grant teachers and similar groups the wage increases due to them, the Government is placed in the position of making things tough on the tax payer in New South Wales.

It is 'the people' who would suffer. No discussion here of taxing the corporate sector of making the rich pay. Even for a 'workers' Government' these options are never considered seriously, and the interests of Capital continue to take precedence over those of the populace in general.

Landa spent most of the interview elaborating why the teachers should not strike and why he perceived their demands to be unreasonable. The reasons he gave with regard to the position that teachers should not strike were firmly grounded in a particular conception of the role and position of the teacher as a worker. Insofar as the initial strike action took place on 'the most important day of school for children', there was a 'duty' on 'responsible' teachers to be at their posts. The stress was clearly on the nature of the occupation as a helping profession performing a serivce to the community, and to children in particular. Thus,

> ... so far as the teachers are concerned we have to weigh up their dual responsibility - a responsibility to themselves to get as much money as they want or feel entitled to and secondly their responsibility to the children. And quite frankly I place their responsibility, as I place my own, first to ensure that these children are not prejudiced. (p. 5.)

Not only was the apparent social role of teachers highlighted in this fashion, but an implicit distinction was made between the teacher as professional and the teacher as worker. In this case, the social status of the teacher was to take precedence over the occupational position: 'I think parents and the public are looking to teachers to proceed in a highly professional way and that doesn't mean getting down into the bear pit like other unions that don't have 800,000 children's futures hanging in the balance.' (p. 10.) According to the Minister, the teachers were striking for a claim which was 'purely and simply for more money' (p. 11), the connotation being that (a) this was the only issue (nothing was said of the staffing demands), and (b) that this in itself was objectionable because it denigrated the character of teaching as a 'higher calling'.

Indeed, the demand for a salaries increase was seen to be unreasonable for a variety of reasons.

> ... they enjoy, in their profession, holidays far and above that which is enjoyed throughout the rest of the community, ten weeks holiday for all teachers, hours of work which they are required to perform and I know many perform extra voluntarily, but they're required to work hours far less than the average employee in industry or in the other areas and also they enjoy tenure that other people don't enjoy, and lastly, so far as their wages are concerned, they enjoy 2 to 3% higher wages than comparable professional, administrative levels in the public service of New South Wales. (p. 8.)

> Afterall, there are countless thousands seeking to go into the profession and an all time low number of people leaving the teaching profession. (p. 9.)

> ... the real rewards are also to be found in the work itself in raising children in a day and age where they've got a lot of difficulties. (p. 13.)

Teachers were presented as having unique benefits and less amount of work than other individuals and groups have to perform. The workworld of the teacher in this respect was grossly misrepresented by Landa, as the real conditions of their labour as presented in the ATF Survey of School Conditions indicates. One gets the impression that teachers should be thankful for the opportunity to reap the intrinsic rewards of helping children. This romantic view of teaching completely ignores the stresses and strains on teachers as they attempt to control, much less educate, children within the mass, compulsory education system. The working conditions of teachers (which includes the structuring of formal education) in fact make it more difficult for teachers to 'raise children' (itself a term which brings to mind the notion that teachers are little more than childminders) in a manner which will leave them satisfied or feeling rewarded with the result.

Perhaps the most remarkable statement made by Landa on the nature of the teachers' work was the following:

Landa: Let me put it to you, it's been suggested to me and I haven't had time to check out the figures, that we are now spending over 300% more on education than we were a decade ago. Now is there a 300% increase in the level of public satisfaction with public system education?

Caroline Jones: Surely it's a lot more difficult to measure the productivity of a teacher (talking over the top of each other).

Landa: ... I don't mean productivity, I'm saying satisfaction in the community with our education system, I think never in its history has it been under greater scrutiny, challenge and criticism.

Caroline Jones: That's not a good reason for teacher bashing, is it? (p. 15.)

The absurdity of this comment should speak for itself. We can only add that 'community' 'satisfaction' (whatever these are supposed to refer to) cannot rest on the shoulders of school personnel who primarily execute policy tasks, but on the structures of education and the decision-makers who maintain these bureaucratic structures.

It is significant with respect to this point, that the teachers were restricted from presenting in any meaningful way their views on why they were taking strike action. As we have seen the media by and large did little to help their cause. Nor were the politicians' comments on the situation supportive (to say the least). An obvious alternative way in which to disseminate information was the schools themselves. This was a route many teachers did pursue; however, not without considerable administrative pressure to desist from sending circulars to parents via the pupils.

A memo from D. Swan, the Director-General of Education, for example, was sent to the Federation concerning the distribution of circulars. In part, the memo stated that:

> From time to time complaints are received from parents objecting to their children being given circulars of an industrial nature to take home from school. The circumstances to which objection is taken are those where school branches of the Federation distribute circulars of an industrial nature to pupils for transmission to parents. This is contrary to departmental requirements and was referred to in the Education Gazette of March 13, 1973, in the following terms: 'Principals and teachers are informed that no arrangement should be made under any circumstances, to distribute through the agency of school pupils notices or pamphlets containing matters of a political of industrial nature.' It now becomes necessary to draw Federation's attention to the complaints and to advise that school principals will have to be reminded that school pupils are not to be used as bearers of this type of information. (NSWTF, 1981c: p. 80.)

The Federation's response was to urge teachers to continue to inform parents about the issues in a 'factual and balanced way'. Judging from parent response which was actually printed in the media, however, these efforts were (apparently) less than successful.

Parents and Citizens Responses

The media coverage of the strike included interviews with representatives of school and parent organisations, child psychologists, education experts, etc., and the printing of a considerable number of letters on the issue. While the majority of teachers who wrote expressing their viewpoints strongly defended the strike action, the general public response was critical of the teachers' actions and demands. Notable exceptions to this were the favourable letters from several nurses and teacher trainees. By and large, however, the reactions which got into print attacked the teachers' militancy for a number of reasons.

Often the reasons presented as to why teachers should not strike were intimately linked to the 'professional' nature of the occupation. As professionals, it was thought that teachers should pursue their demands in the least disruptive way. Paul Jeremy, President of the Parents and Citizens Federation, for example, was quoted in the press as stating that: 'We support the right of teachers to campaign through normal industrial channels for better conditions but parents throughout NSW will be appalled by this latest example of teacher militancy.' (SMH, 'Schools Strike: Wran Steps In', 24 January: emphasis added.)

In other words, strikes are abnormal and, more particularly, it is expected of teachers that they treat their immediate responsibility to educate children as being of greater importance than their own conditions of labour. This kind of thinking reflects both an anti-union sentiment, and the adoption of a traditional view of what teachers are supposed to be like. For example, a letter to the Australian (18 February) laments the fact that:

> The teachers' union is a supposedly vocational group whose professional training and privileged responsibility should place them above the selfish, pressure-group tactics. With their latest action, teachers have surely forfeited all right to the community's respect.

The author of the letter goes on to later comment that:

> Australia's potential as a wonderful country can never be realised if we can't arrest the apathetic public acceptance of selfish, anti-social strikes and related stoppages which constantly disrupt our lives and undermine the country's future.
>
> (C.P. Bond, "What an apathetic example!').

Here we see a blatant juxtaposition of the 'bad union' with the 'vocational group'. For teachers to stoop so low as to engage in strike activity is, to the author of the letter, a denigration of the status and ideals of the occupation.

It also raises the question of control, and rights, in the educational sphere. One parent, for instance, argued that 'Parents must have the

right to be informed, consulted, involved and to participate in all matters relating to their child's education and social needs.' (Fay Stern, letter to S.M.H., 29 January). In the context of the strike issue, however, it needs to be said that, while appearing to be simply an attack on teachers, Stern's letter in fact broaches the real issue of community involvement versus state control. Nevertheless, one is left with the impression that teachers are completely responsible for the taking of strike action (i.e., as if the employer or court had nothing to do with it). Furthermore, as an editorial in the Sun commented: '....as their gripes mount, it seems that teachers are more interested in taking over the school system than they are in teaching within it.' (4 February). Again this kind of statement extends the debate beyond the issues at hand, and in so doing raises fears as to the motives of teachers. Hence, the strike action by teachers, based upon an unjust salaries decision and unreasonable staffing arrangements, is transformed into a threat to civil liberties and a desire by teachers to extend their control over public education.

Related to this, many letters made the assumption that the Federation itself was run by Communists and Secular Humanists. Although the strike was threatening to a number of people, the rank-and-file teacher was not really directly to blame, they just were not being honest to themselves.

> Like so many trade unionists, they have abandoned their responsibility to participate and allowed a militant activist minority and politically motivated leadership to take control of their union's affairs. Here is an articulate, thinking group of people who through sheer apathy allow themselves to be irresponsibly manipulated - even those many teachers who deserve considerable praise for their all-round commitment which goes far beyond normal classroom activity. (C.P. Bond, letter to the Australian, 18 February).

Regardless of whether or not this argument could be sustained, it effectively de-legitimates the strike action because that action would not be seen to reflect the real wishes and interests of the majority of teachers. It presents the strike as even more abnormal and exceptional, and not as reflecting the informed support of the majority of teachers for action against an 'obstinate and unreasonable' employer (Peter Earley, 'Why teachers

are right', letter to S.M.H., 16 February).

One of the main arguments against the teachers strike was of course based upon an appeal to the notion that children are the victims. Paul Jeremy, for example, was quick to voice his opinion that 'There will be no winners, but 800,000 innocent victims. The strike decision is utterly irresponsible.' (D.T., 25 January). The opinion that any strike by teachers must have a negative effect on children was not only presented by lay persons such as Jeremy, but 'experts' were cited in the press as well. The Sydney Morning Herald reported that:

> The NSW Teachers' Federation and many individual teachers make political pawns of young children to win pay claims, according to a Sydney paediatrician, Dr. Clair Isbister. She said yesterday that great stress is put on children and their parents by 'wretched teachers' who strike. (January 29).

The ideological significance of this kind of statement is that it focuses on teachers as the perpetrators of a 'wretched' act, and completely ignores the employer. It attempts to play on the public's and teachers' emotions in a way which will generate sufficient outrage that the teachers (again no mention of the employer) will give in and become less militant.

Linked to the argument that children are victims, is the idea that teachers are setting a bad example to children when they go on strike.

> This above-the-law attitude of teachers makes it difficult to persuade our children to abide by the law in general. The above-the-law attitude of teachers further adds to the increasing cynicism with which the genuineness of teachers is regarded. (Parent's letter to John Hughes, Federation Organiser, 27 August).

and

> What is it these children have learnt? When you don't get your own way, whether with parents, or governments, you throw a tantrum and go on strike. (M. Wood, 'A question of discipline', letter to S.M.H., 12 February).

These particular attempts to discredit teachers are notable in that first, they focus on the consequences of striking and not the causes; second, they absolve the employer from any responsibility in resolving the dispute; and third, they equate the strike tactics with above-the-law attitudes and tantrums, and do not represent it as the only real weapon that people who sell their labour power have against the employer. Strikes are seen as emotional responses to a benevolent authority (i.e., governments are equated with parents), and there is no overt recognition of the power relations underpinning the teacher-employer relationship.

By far and away the most common reaction to the teachers' demand for a pay rise was that of arguing that they really were not that badly off. In strict money terms, the following kinds of arguments were presented:

> At present they are a privileged profession. The assessment of their remuneration must be scaled down to compensate for undeniable benefits they receive in the form of 10 weeks' annual holidays and a shorter working day. (M. Robinson, 'Comparisons', letter to S.M.H., 9 February).
>
> The strike solution is obvious - pay the teachers, say 15 per cent rise and put them on a 37½ hour week, with four weeks annual leave. Those few dedicated professionals already doing this would get a well-earned 15 per cent rise. Those who didn't like it would ship out and good riddance. (R. Grieve, 'Why teachers are privileged', letter to Australian, 11 February).
>
> I haven't seen a teacher without a car, I haven't seen a teacher who [isn't] well dressed, not always at school I might add....(Caller 14, 'City Extra', radio 2BL, 26 January). (p. 39)

Embodied in these statements are particular conceptions regarding the nature of teachers' work, and a somewhat peculiar idea of what a strike is about. In the former case, it is assumed that teaching is a privileged job because the formal working week is so short and extended holidays are included. This misrepresents the sheer amount of work teachers actually do have to perform, particularly as a result of school-based curriculum developments and the adoption of child-centred pedagogy in the schools.

It omits the hours of preparation necessary to do a lesson, and the sheer mental and emotional drain on teachers as they perform their classroom duties. To a certain extent, these statements attempt to argue a quantitative case (i.e., the focus on hours and holidays) at the expense of looking at the qualitative features of the teaching occupation. Simple comparisons based upon these criteria are bound to render a judgement which sees teachers as perhaps more 'privileged' than is really the case.

The latter comment quoted above is more a comment on strikes than on the teaching occupation itself. The author seems perplexed as to why teachers, who are apparently well off, would feel the need to go on strike. This is just sheer ignorance of the issues involved, and the immediate (the court's findings and judgement) and historical (loss in salary relativities) factors leading up to the strike decision. We also might add here Manefield's comment that: 'As for the question of you haven't seen a teacher without a car, I imagine certainly in the street in which I live, which is in a fairly modest suburb, I don't know that I see any of the residents in that suburb without a car.' (City Extra', radio, 2BL, 26 January: p. 39).

Closely aligned with the argument that teachers were not badly off was the notion of dedication and responsibility. Thus,

> Several years ago the Teaching Federation was deservedly respected and when I say you, I mean that's the plural of the Teachers Federation. Today I think that it's not so respected as it was. I think it's lost a lot of its devotion and it's got money hungry.
> (Caller 5, 'City Extra', radio 2BL, 26 January: p. 18).

and

> I would like to suggest that the rewards of teaching are not all financial, that caring for the children and helping them, especially the underprivileged, should be the prime reason for taking up a teaching profession and I'd like to suggest that those teachers who do not enjoy this other reward should not be teaching, they should employ their talents somewhere else.
> Because in the schoos nowdays, I find that the child's needs come last

and the teacher's needs come first in many cases. (Caller 12, 'City Extra', radio 2BL, 26 January: p. 33/34).

With respect to this, it is clear to see that moral pressure is put on teachers to live up to the traditional image of the occupation as a disinterested vocation, and enjoy the 'other rewards' which exist by virtue of the nature of the service being provided. Not only does this refuse to recognise that teachers can be and are exploited by the employer, but it also paints a somewhat indealised picture of the teaching occupation itself.

It also ignores the fact that teachers are under considerable parent and public pressure to perform their tasks well. The aims and objectives for education of various interested parties may in fact differ and create problems. One result of this during the strike period was the appearance of an agrument against giving the teachers a salary increase because the standards of education and the attitudes of teachers did not warrant it (m. Cortis-Jones, 'School strike unjustified', letter to S.M.H., 29 January). This probably reflects the effectiveness of right-wing ideological attacks on public schooling in general, especially in light of the privatisation of schooling debates, rather than being based upon first-hand knowledge of what teachers actually do take part in, in the clasroom. Also, it equates 'good schooling' simply with 'good teachers', thereby not taking into account the possible effects of spending cuts on the materials, resources and facilities available which could improve a particular learing situation. John Hughes (1981) cites an interesting comment by a NSW Regional Director of Education on the question of teachers and education.
The Director said:

> I won't talk to you about teachers in general, I'll talk to you about the teachers at your child's school, because they are the ones you know about. 99 times out of 100 parents tell me that their teachers are dedicated and conscientious. It is the ones at the school over the hill that they have heard stories about, and when I talk to the parents at that school - their teachers are O.K. its the other school they are worried about. (p. 3/4).

As much as anything, this comment indicates the ability of the mass media to convey an impression of a particular group, event and/or institution, and in the process heavily influence the attitudes and behaviour of the public. The image being conveyed may in fact be short on substance when it comes to the actual case in point.

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has focused on the relationship between the presentation of the strike in public discourse and the preceived legitimacy of teacher industrial conflict. The general analytical concerns which have guided the presentation can be summarised as follows:

1. During the strike action the printed media and radio talk-back shows in Sydney engaged in various treatments of the event. From these reports, a broad picture was derived of how the teachers' activities were viewed. The analysis specifically centered on the ways in which ideological elements relating to the teachers' behaviour were articulated during the course of the dispute.

2. As part of the examination of the press treatment, various notions of 'the teacher' - as a conceptual construct - were considered. Some of the more obvious examples of how conceptions of the role of the teacher were tied into the strike action are to be found in statements appealing to the teacher's 'professionalism', 'sense of responsibility', and status as '(moral) guardians' of the future generations.

3. The analysis was also directed to how the strike itself was presented. The articulation of ideological elements in this instance was particularly informative of the portrayal of conflicts in the media. For example, there was an over-concentration on the effects or consequences of the strike ('chaos', 'holding children to ransom'), and less attention paid to the causes. The strikers were depicted as 'unreasonable',

'confrontationist', and as the active party in the dispute. By way of contrast, the Government was seen as reasonable and as representing the interests of the community as a whole. Thus, a marked difference was apparent in the application of terms to particular groups, differences which connotated varying degrees of 'correctness' or legitimacy in the actions taken.

4. The intermeshing of various ideological elements from analytically distinguishable frameworks of assumptions - i.e., the position of workers, and the role of teacher - acted so as to de-legitimate the teachers' strike activities as well as to demarcate the 'proper' sphere for their practices. With respect to this, the emphasis on the role of the teacher - as ideologically constructed and idealised - serves to displace attention away from i) the actual structural role and practices of teachers under capitalism, and ii) their position as workers in that system. For example, 'the teacher', who is responsible, professional, and puts her/his interests behind that of the greater good of the community, is contrasted with 'the striker', who like all militant workers, will not listen to reason and will not accept the (supposedly) rational argument that 'strikes achieve nothing'.

Reactions from a diverse range of people to the strike highlights the pressures placed upon teachers to conform to particular notions of the occupation. Indeed, the public response to the dispute reproduced many of the confusions surrounding the position and image of the teacher in contemporary Australian society. Certainly the case of 'professional' teachers going on strike is doubly invidious to some members of the public. In part this stems from the fact that strikes are generally presented in the media as inherently bad, as something in which a respected occupational group should not become involved.

As we have seen, a fact of life for teachers is that, regardless of the position they adopt, they are damned if they do something, and damned if they do not. As strikers, teachers incur the wrath of those who believe that teachers should not behave in such militant fashion. If they do not take strong measures, however, teachers are left passively responding to deteriorating work and educational conditions in the government schools.

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